Summary

An innovative respite care program designed for people with mild dementia living in the community was collaboratively developed, implemented, researched, reviewed and expanded. This program aimed to teach people with mild dementia how to perform stand up comedy and improvisation. The main aim was to actively engage people with mild dementia in the creation of humour and laughter for themselves and others in a program of 2 hour workshops over 8 weeks.

Evaluation highlighted that the program had many therapeutic benefits for participants such as improvements in memory, learning, sociability, communication and self-esteem. The flow-on effects for carers were also positive as well but most importantly however, the participants had fun and laughed a lot. The program has been rolled out to 9 local, regional respite care centres, engaging over 250 people with dementia. In addition, a comedic facilitators program was developed and delivered to 20 people whom have returned to their regions in Australian and begun delivering the Stand Up Program.

Background

Dementia is expected to become the third leading cause of morbidity in people over 65 by 2030. Social isolation, depression and loneliness often accompanies dementia. Approaches that assist people with dementia to engage in their community and participate in social activity are becoming more important as numbers increase and more remain living in the community longer.

The Stand Up program was an evidence based program developed through collaboration and a free exchange of ideas which resulted in identifying a need in the community by the community. It was also able to foster Government relationships and recognition as a result of the Community Dementia Support Grant. The program was first offered to participants with the aim of providing an opportunity to have fun and engage with others in a social activity that was safe and one in which they could succeed despite their cognitive decline. The vicarious therapeutic outcomes of this activity were measured to show many other unintended benefits such as improvement in memory, confidence, communication and overall happiness.

Learning

The learning experiences resulted in the successful project management of a complex and multi-stakeholder community-based project and an associated nationally competitive research grant. We conclude that managing the ever increasing number of people with dementia should not be driven by medico-pharmacological based models but from

Stand Up for Dementia: Developing, implementing and researching an innovative recreational and therapeutic program involving performance and humour for people with dementia who are living in the community.

Associate Professor John Stevens
School of Health and Human Services

In collaboration with Ms Mandy Nolan, Comedic Facilitator;
Ms Tarnya Daniels, Manager Respite Services, Baptist Community Services Alstonville
Outcomes

In the first full year of implementation 250 people with dementia have completed the program at 9 different respite care facilities within Northern NSW with positive flow on effects to just as many carers and professional staff. The Facilitators program trained 20 people from NSW, VIC, SA, QLD and NT as comedian facilitators the Stand Up program. This program was enabled through a national grant and was delivered in May 2012 with the intent of the participants returning to their states to deliver the Stand Up program that year. In addition, the program has been adopted into the continuous professional development (CPD) program of the School of Health and Human Sciences, Southern Cross University. There has been 1 peer reviewed publication, 10 conference presentations and at least 20 media reports resulting from this activity.

Impact

Professional Carers report improved morale and motivation among staff as they experience the positive effects of the programs on their participants. This makes the difficult job of caring for people with dementia more enjoyable and may have an impact on recruitment, retention and performance. Communication, self-esteem and overall well-being were identified as the flow on affects to carers and staff that were created by the program.

The activity has allowed the combination of both theory and practice to assist people with dementia by developing an innovative program that is fun for the participants as well as of therapeutic value.

For researchers, the project provided a rich vein of research and discovery to work with for the future, whilst being able to apply their research in a way that is community-driven and meaningful for them as community members and researchers.

Through a nationally competitive grant, Stand Up for Dementia was able to develop and enhance the relationship between Government, Southern Cross University and Baptist Community Service.

Awards Category

Community Impact

Good practice principles

Partnership, collaboration, trust, respect, community-based, empowerment, innovation

Recognition

This project was the recipient of a Commendation for Community Impact at the Southern Cross University’s Excellence in Community Engagement Awards in 2012.